

A point where he differed from later reformers was the belief in purgatory, which he retained to the end of his life.<sup>1</sup> It was in no way inconsistent with his repudiation of masses for the dead, indulgences, and the 'merits of the Saints.' The latter doctrine he declared to be a 'blasphemy blabbered without ground.'<sup>2</sup> Although he attacked many superstitions connected with the conception of purgatory, that conception itself never appeared to him as anything but rational.

It is impossible to understand fully Wycliffe's position about pardons, sin-rents, and the abuse of the confessional, if we regard him as an intellectual leader only. His strong moral feeling made him one of the reprovers of the bad age in which he lived. He saw all classes of the laity indulging in every form of violence and vice. He thought that the sale of pardons and the venality of the friar confessors were actual encouragements of sin, and stood in the way of true repentance. In this opinion he was supported by Langland, the Jonah who was perpetually denouncing the sins of that generation:—

For comfort of his confessor Contrition  
he left, That is sovereign salve for all  
kinds of sins.<sup>3</sup>

But Wycliffe's objections were the more deeply rooted of the two. He quarrelled with the very theory, not merely with the abuse, of the mediaeval religion. Deeds of a ceremonial nature seemed to him unsatisfactory and nugatory. No sacrament or ceremony could for him be the basis of the relations between the moral being and God. His attitude was not purely negative, and was furthest removed of all from that of the mere scoffer. He was the herald of the Puritan movement, not only in its repudiation of ceremonies, but in the stern individual morality which it substituted. Judging from the history of the early Lollards, he failed in instilling this spirit into his first disciples ; but his own works breathe of it, and his life bears witness to the dauntless courage of a man who believes in his own immediate relation to God.

<sup>1</sup> *S. E. W.* L 101 and 333, ii. 100, iii. 339 ; *Sermones*, iv. 21; *De Bias.*, 119.  
<sup>2</sup> *S. E. W.* iii. 262.                      \* *P. PL. C.* xxiii. 371-2.